



MAURIZIO BALDASSARI

Mastering the art of unpretentious style.

While numerous Italian clothing collections feature modern designs crafted in luxury fabrics from the world's top mills, few offer the panache, the elegance and the intrinsic value of Maurizio Baldassari. A family business based in the Brera district of Milan (home to creative types from artists to architects to entrepreneurs), this luxury menswear company was founded in 1982 by Maurizio Baldassari, a designer who started his career sharing an office with Giorgio Armani at La Rinascente department stores, Italy's most famous retailer. When Maurizio left to establish his own collection, his exceptional aesthetic sensibility attracted the attention of Takashimaya Japan, his first client. Since then, he's built a successful luxury menswear business throughout Europe and Asia, and with select stores in the US.

The hallmarks of the collection are its easy modern designs, luxurious fabrics and *fatto bene* craftsmanship. As Renato Baldassari (who with his brother Roberto runs the business; Maurizio is still active and, with his wife Grazia, remains the heart and soul of the company), explains it, "Because we're a family business, we put much passion into our products. Many family businesses in Italy are now owned by big corporations, so they're driven by the numbers. We're not so much thinking about profit but rather about people and positioning: how will it look on the selling floor, on specific customers? If we love a fabric, we will price the item to sell rather than figure out how many meters at what price per meter... The beauty of

a family business is its flexibility."

Although Baldassari is most famous for its ultra-soft sweater knit jackets, beautiful spring options abound, from linen-blend and cotton crepe sport coats to light merino jersey knits. Spring '18 favorites include an extra-fine merino knit cardigan (laser cut and fully fashioned) available in many colors, a linen-blend zip-front jacket, an all-season reversible leather jacket in the softest napa, and a softly constructed unlined sport coat that's cashmere outside, cotton inside. The collection is crafted totally in Italy; the company employs 10 people in Milan and 10 artisan partners in various nearby districts.

Asked to define "style," Renato suggests it's better left undefined. "Style is not the same for everyone. It's an attitude, it's being confident and comfortable in what you wear. It's less about the way you look and more about how you feel. If you're comfortable and relaxed, you're stylish. Of course, Italian style is a little more 'proper' than American style: growing up in the showroom with my dad, it came naturally to me. I would never dress for work like I'm going to the gym."

What tips would he give to American men who want to elevate their style? "Few American men take the time to explore fashion; they wear what they've always worn. I suggest they take a risk now and then; try something new! Who knows: it might pay off in wonderful ways..." **BY KAREN ALBERG GROSSMAN**